



Islamic Online University

The Three Shelters

A Commentary on Chapters
112, 113 & 114 of the Qur'aan
[Also Known as the Three Quls]

By

Dr. Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips

Module 8

تفسير سورة الفلق

Tafseer Soorah al-Falaq

Verse 4

﴿وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ﴾

4. “From the evil of those who blow on knots.”

Allaah mentions in this verse the second major source of evil in His creation, the evil of sorcerers and witches. Thus, this verse focuses on magic and those who practice it.

﴿وَمِنْ شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ﴾

“From the evil of those who blow on knots,” refers to witches and warlocks who tie knots in threads while blowing on each knot in order to cast spells. This was a common method used in many parts of the world.

MAGIC

Magic may be defined as the seeming control or foresight of natural forces or events by ritual invocation of supernatural beings. It includes the belief that men can coerce nature by the use of certain rites, formulas and actions.¹ In Arabic the term *sihr* (magic) is defined as whatever is caused by hidden or subtle forces.² For example, the Prophet (ﷺ) was reported to have said, “Verily, some forms of speech are magic [*sihr*].”³ The speeches of an eloquent, charismatic speaker who makes right seem wrong and vice versa, fall into this category. Thus, the Prophet (ﷺ) referred to some aspects of speech as being magical.⁴ The pre-dawn meal taken before fasting is called *saḥoor* or *suḥoor*⁵ because its time is in the darkness at the end of the night. The magician is called *saahir* and the one spellbound *mashoor*.

¹ *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Publishing Co., 10th ed., 1975), p.813.

² *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol.1, pp.1316-1317.

³ Collected by al-Bukhari (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 7, p.445, no. 662), Muslim, and Abu Dawud (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol.3, p.1393, no.4989) and at-Tirmithi.

⁴ ‘Umar al-Ashqar, *Aalam as-Sihr wa ash-Sha‘wadhaḥ* (Kuwait: Daar an-Nafaa’is, 1st ed., 1989), p. 69.

⁵ *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol.1, p.1317.

In addition to the above-mentioned terms, a bewitched person is described as *matboob* from the verb *tubba* meaning to become bewitched.⁶ A magician is termed *mu'azzim*, and a spell is called '*azeemah*'.⁷

According to Islaamic law, magic has been defined as "a contract or incantation, spoken or written, or something done which will affect the body, heart or mind of the one bewitched without actually coming in contact with him."⁸ It has also been defined as "the occurrence of extraordinary [*khaariq*] events when something prohibited in the divine law [*shar'*] is said or done. Allaah, Most Glorious, has permitted this occurrence to take place spontaneously whenever such acts are said or done."⁹

The Reality of Magic

Orthodox Islaam rejects the effects of charms and amulets with regards to the prevention of misfortune and the attraction of good fortune. However, most Sunnite scholars recognize that there are other aspects of magic which are real and that they are not all cases of illusion.¹⁰ Al-Qaraafee¹¹ stated, "Magic is real. The bewitched person could die or his nature and habits could change even if it [i.e., the magic] did not touch him. This was the position of ash-Shaafi'ee and Ibn Hanbal. The Hanafites held that if smoke or something similar reached the person's body, it [i.e., magic] could have an effect, otherwise it could not. The Qadarites¹² held that there was no reality to magic."¹³

Evidence for the Reality of Magic

The majority of Muslim scholars hold that magic is real because of its prohibitions in the Qur'aan and Sunnah. There are severe warnings for those who

⁶ *Fat-h al-Baaree*, vol.10, p.228. See also *an-Nihaayah*, vol.3, p.110.

⁷ *Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol.2, p.2038.

⁸ Ibn Qudaamah, *al-Mughnee* (Cairo: Hijr, 1st ed., 1990), vol.12, p.229.

⁹ Muhammad 'Alee al-Faruqee at-Tahaanawee, *Kashf Istilaahaat al-Funoon* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Misriyyah al-'Aammah li al-Kutub, 1973), p.152.

¹⁰ *Al-Jaami' li Ahkaam al-Qur'aan*, vol.2, p.46.

¹¹ Ahmad ibn Idrees al-Qaraafee (d.1275), of Moroccan-Berber origin, was born and raised in Egypt. He was one of the leading scholars of the Maalikite school of jurisprudence. Among his many books on canon law are *Anwaar al-Burooq fee Anwaa' al-Furooq*, a 4 volume work; *al-Ihkaam fee Tamyeez al-Fataawaa* and *Sharh Tanqeeh al-Fusool*. (*Al-A'laam*, vol.1, pp.94-95.)

¹² Qadariyyah (Eng. Qadarites), a name used regularly as a descriptive surname for Mu'tazilites. (*Shorter Encyclopedia of Islaam*, p. 200.)

¹³ Ahmad ibn Idrees al-Qaraafee, *al-Burooq fee Anwaa' al-Furooq* (Beirut: Daar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), vol.4, p.149. See also *al-Mughnee*, vol.12, p.299.

practice it and a practitioner can be punished accordingly in this life as well as in the next. Allaah has also revealed how to seek refuge from magic. According to these scholars, it is illogical for Islaamic law and the revealed texts to treat something (e.g., magic) in such a serious and severe manner if it is unreal. There is specific evidence used by the orthodox majority to prove that there is such a thing as magic.

The first proof is the following Qur'aanic verse:

“...But it was the devils who disbelieved by teaching the people magic and what was revealed to the two angels, Harut and Maaroot, in Babylon. However, the two would not teach anyone anything until after they had warned them, saying, ‘Surely, we are only a test and a trial, so do not disbelieve.’ But the people went ahead and learned from the two of them what would cause the separation of a man from his wife. However, they could not harm anyone except by Allaah’s permission. They learned what would harm their own souls and not benefit them.” (Soorah al-Baqarah, 2:102)

If there is no reality to magic, what were the devils teaching and what were the people learning? The fact that the magician is referred to in this verse as being able to separate a man from his wife and to harm people (by Allaah’s permission) is sufficient evidence that magic is real.

Real magic is the product of satanic intervention. Both the acts of magic and the effects of spells on humans involve the agency of the *jinn*. Al-Aaloosee addressed this issue, saying, “*What is meant by magic is an act which resembles a miracle but is not because it [i.e., magic] is learned. And in order to perform it the help of the devil is sought by pleasing him with abominable acts. [These acts may be in the form of] statements, like incantations containing phrases of shirk and praises of Satan; acts, like planet worship and an adherence to crime and licentiousness; and beliefs, like the preference and love of whatever is necessary to please [the devil].*”¹⁴ Al-Ghazzaalee was quoted as defining magic as follows, “*Magic is something which is derived from knowledge of the special characteristics of elements [jawaahir] and mathematical calculations related to the time of the rising of the celestial bodies. From these special characteristics a form is made resembling the bewitched person, and a particular time of the rising of celestial bodies is awaited. When the time arrives, words of disbelief and obscenity, which contravene divine law, are uttered to obtain access to the devil’s assistance. The combination of these factors results in - according to normal*

¹⁴ *Rooh al-Ma‘anee*, vol.1, p.338.

procedure - strange conditions within the bewitched person."¹⁵ During this discussion on the type of *sihr* in which the devil's help is employed, ar-Raaghib said, *"The second [type] is that in which the devil's help is attracted by acts which will gain favor, as in the Almighty's statement: 'Shall I inform you about those upon whom the devils descend? They descend on every lying sinner.'"*¹⁶

Dr. 'Umar al-Ashqar explicitly stated, *"...Real magic is that in which the magician relies upon the devil. Our Lord, whose knowledge encompasses all things, has informed us that it was the devils who taught mankind magic: '...Sulaymaan did not commit disbelief, but it was the devils who disbelieved and taught mankind magic.'"*¹⁷

A good example of the relationship of magic to possession can also be seen in the incident in which 'Abdullaah ibn Mas'ood found his wife wearing a knotted, cord necklace and asked about its purpose. She informed him that it was given to her by a Jewish magician and that a spell had been placed on it to stop her eye from twitching, which it did. Ibn Mas'ood snatched it from her neck, told her it was an act of *shirk* and informed her that the twitching was caused by a *jinnee* which stopped when the spell was placed on her."¹⁸

Sources of Cure

In cases where possession is a result of magic the most effective method of canceling its effects is by finding and undoing the charm used in the bewitchment. Ibn al-Qayyim stated, *"Removing the charm and neutralizing it is the most profound treatment."*¹⁹ Once the charm has been found and dismantled, the spell will be broken and the *jinnee* connected with it will leave the person alone. This was the method used by Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) on the occasion of his own bewitchment. Zayd ibn Arqam reported that a Jew, by the name of Labeed ibn A'sam [from the Zuraaq clan],²⁰ cast a spell on the Prophet (ﷺ). When he began to suffer from it, Jibreel came to him and revealed the two chapters for seeking refuge (*mu'awwidhataan*) and then said to him, *"Surely, it was a Jew who cast this spell on you, and the magical charm is in a certain well."* The Prophet (ﷺ)

¹⁵ Quoted in Siddeeq Hasan Khaan's *ad-Deen al-Khaalis* (Cairo: Maktaba Daar al-'Aroobah, 1960), vol.2, p.324.

¹⁶ Ar-Raaghib al-Asfahaanee, *al-Mufradaat fee Ghareeb al-Qur'aan* (Cairo: Mustafaa al-Baabee al-Halabee, 1381 A.H.), p.226. The Qur'aanic quote is 26:221-222.

¹⁷ *'Aalam as-Sihr wa ash-Sha'wadhah*, p. 152. The Qur'aanic quote is 2:102.

¹⁸ See *Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol.3, p.1089, no.3874.

¹⁹ *Zaad al-Ma'aad*, vol.3, p.104, See also *at-Tibb an-Nabawee*, p.124.

²⁰ What appears in brackets was mentioned in al-Bukhari's narration. See *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol.7, pp. 443-444, no.660. See also *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3, pp. 1192-3, no. 5428.

sent ‘Alee ibn Abee Taalib to go and fetch the charm. When he returned with it, the Prophet (ﷺ) told him to untie the knots, one by one, and to recite a verse from the two chapters with the undoing of each knot. When he did so, the Prophet (ﷺ) got up as if he had been released from being tied up. Although destroying the charm is the best method of breaking the spell, it is the most difficult, unless someone confesses or the charm is discovered accidentally. The Prophet (ﷺ) only found out the location of the charm by revelation. Consequently, the cases of *jinn*-possession induced by magic may be treated by the usual method for general demonic possession outlined below:

Since the time of the Prophet (ﷺ) recitation of the Qur’aan for the sick has been an accepted practice among Muslims. Textual evidence for the use of the Qur’aan in curing illnesses is based upon the following verses:

وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَلَا يَزِيدُ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٨٢﴾

“We revealed in stages of the Qur’aan that which is a healing and mercy for believers. But to the unjust it only adds to their loss.”

(Soorah al-Isra’, 17:82)

يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ قَدْ جَاءَتْكُمْ مَوْعِظَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَشِفَاءٌ لِّمَا فِي الصُّدُورِ وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾

“O mankind, there has come to you [in the Qur’aan] an admonition from your Lord and a healing for the [diseases] in your hearts. And for the believers, a guidance and mercy.”
(Soorah Yoonus, 10: 57)

Soorah al-Faatihah

The companions of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) used to recite chapters and verses of the Qur'aan as a cure for possession as well as other illnesses. The uncle of Khaarijah ibn as-Salt reported that he went to the Prophet (ﷺ) and embraced Islaam. During his return journey, he came across a tribe which had among them a madman fettered in iron chains. The madman's family said to him, "We have been informed that your companion [i.e., Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ)] has come with good. Do you have anything with which to treat illnesses?" He recited over him *Faatihah al-Kitaab*,²¹ and he got well. [In another narration it stated: "He recited over him *Faatihah al-Kitaab* every morning and evening for three days. Whenever he would finish his recitation, he would gather his saliva and spit. And he got well."] They gave him one hundred sheep [but he was in doubt about whether he should accept them] so he went back to Allaah's Messenger and informed him of the incident. The Prophet (ﷺ) asked him, "Did you recite anything else besides this?" He replied that he had not. The Prophet (ﷺ) then said, "Take them, for by my religion, whoever devours the payment for a false incantation will be destroyed. Indeed, you have eaten the price of a truthful incantation."²²

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ أَنَّ جِبْرِيلَ أَتَى النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقَالَ يَا مُحَمَّدُ اشْتَكَيْتَ فَقَالَ
نَعَمْ قَالَ بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ أَرْقِيكَ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ يُؤْذِيكَ مِنْ شَرِّ كُلِّ نَفْسٍ أَوْ عَيْنٍ حَاسِدٍ اللَّهُ
يُشْفِيكَ بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ أَرْقِيكَ

Aboo Sa'eed related that Angel Jibreel came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked: "Muhammad! Have you fallen ill?" He replied, "Yes." Jibreel then said: "In the Name of Allaah I exorcise you from everything which may harm you, from the evil of every soul, or jealous eye. May Allaah cure you. In Allaah's Name I exorcise you."²³

Madeenite Dates

For protection against magic or for its treatment, the Prophet (ﷺ) recommended the eating of dates in the morning. Sa'd quoted the Messenger of Allaah (ﷺ) as saying,

²¹ The first chapter of the Qur'aan.

²² Collected by Abu Dawud (*Sunan Abu Dawud*, vol.3, p.1093, no.3892) and authenticated by al-Albaanee in *Sahih Sunan Abee Daawood*, vol.2, p.737, no.3297.

²³ *Sahih Muslim*, vol.3, p. 1192, no.5425.

عَنْ سَعْدٍ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ مَنْ تَصَبَّحَ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ سَبْعَ تَمَرَاتٍ
عَجْوَةً لَمْ يَضُرَّهُ فِي ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ سُمْ وَلَا سِحْرٌ

“Whoever takes seven [Madeenite]²⁴ ‘ajwah²⁵ dates in the morning, neither magic nor poison will hurt him that day.”²⁶

Those who reject the reality of magic argue that the possession or bewitchment of the Prophets contradict Allaah’s protection of them. This argument is weak because Allaah also tested the Prophets by allowing some of the harmful acts of their pagan enemies to affect them.²⁷

²⁴ What appears in the brackets was mentioned in Muslim’s narration. See *Sahih Muslim*, vol.3, p. 1129, no. 5080.

²⁵ The best kind of Madeenite dates coming from the Leenah palm-tree. (*Arabic-English Lexicon*, vol. 2, pp.1968-1969). See *The Exorcist Tradition in Islaam*.

²⁶ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol.7, p.446, no.664 and *Sahih Muslim*, vol.3, p.1129, no.5081.

²⁷ *Badaa’i at-Tafseer*, vol. 5, p. 411.